

APPEARED
ON PAGE 1

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State Dept. Official to Let Staff Talk to Times Correspondent

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 4 — The director of the State Department's Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs said today that he had decided to lift an order forbidding members of his bureau to talk to a correspondent for The New York Times.

The correspondent, Leslie H. Gelb, wrote an article concerning the disclosure in Canada, Iceland, Bermuda and Puerto Rico of American contingency plans for "emergency" deployment of nuclear depth charges in those locations. The article, saying the Governments that were to be hosts under the plan had not been informed, said that the plans had been divulged in press reports there and had become the subject of sharp public debate in Canada and Iceland.

After the article was published in The Times on Feb. 13, the bureau director, Lieut. Gen. John I. Chain Jr., ordered his staff not to speak to Mr. Gelb, asserting that the reporter had knowingly published classified information, the release of which was harmful to national security.

On Saturday, a senior White House official said that President Reagan's national security adviser, Robert C. McFarlane, had authorized a State Department official to assist Mr. Gelb in researching the article. The White House official said Mr. McFarlane had taken the action in an attempt to minimize potential national security breaches. Mr. Gelb had proposed at the outset to limit the scope of the article to information already published in newspapers abroad, even though he had more sensitive information.

After Mr. Gelb began gathering information for the article, Secretary of State George P. Shultz asked The Times not to publish it.

Information Already Published

A. M. Rosenthal, the executive editor of The Times, said last week that General Chain must have known that the article "contained no information that had not already been published and debated in the countries named in the story."

Today, in a statement issued by the State Department's press office, General Chain continued to maintain that publication of the article had damaged

the nation's security.

Mr. Gelb was director of the bureau from 1977 to 1979. After the article appeared, General Chain took down a framed photograph of Mr. Gelb that was hanging in the office with the photographs of other previous directors of the bureau.

A sign was put in place of the photograph saying that the picture had been "removed for cause" because Mr. Gelb "did willingly, and knowingly, publish in 1985, classified information, the release of which is harmful and damaging to the country."

As of late today, Mr. Gelb's picture had not been returned to the wall. Instead, the frame containing the sign had been taken down.

General's Statement

The statement by General Chain said: "Having accomplished enormously more than I ever expected to in focusing attention on the question of leaks of classified information in the Government, and so as not to divert this bureau's time and attention from the important substantive issues for which it is responsible, today I have rescinded the ban of Mr. Gelb from this bureau and have removed the sign which expresses my strong personal and continuing conviction that his act of publishing classified information damaged our nation's security.

"In doing this, I would like to make clear: (1) I have not been asked or told to do this. (2) I did what I did, more in sorrow than in anger. (3) I am a strong believer in a free press. (4) I believe the American people deserve a higher set of standards than they sometimes get from a few people concerning national security issues. (5) The substantive issue of leaks of classified information which damages national security remains. What we need is for the press to help us solve it."

'Unwarranted Charge'

Today, Seymour Topping, managing editor of The Times, expressed concern that General Chain "continues to express a personal opinion that Mr. Gelb was responsible for publishing classified information damaging to the security of the United States."

"This is an unwarranted charge against The Times, which published the article, and an unfair, unsubstantiated attack on the professional reputation of Mr. Gelb," Mr. Topping said. "As statements by White House offi-

cial have made clear, The Times and Mr. Gelb went to great lengths, in consultation with State Department officials, to report on sensitive matters in a responsible manner and in fulfillment of the need to keep the American public fully informed," he continued.

"As a Government official, General Chain has an obligation to set the record straight," Mr. Topping said.